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The Maryland House of Delegates
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Delegate Dana Stein Testimony in Support of HB 1068 -

Local Health Department, Environmental Health Specialist and On-Site Sewage Disposal Systems – Systems Standards, Regulations, Applications and Funding

HB 1068 is a key companion bill to HB 318 heard earlier this session that sets better standards and accountability for the septic or On-Site sewage disposal industry. This bill looks to another part of the process: the local governments permitting process. HB 1068 works to improve the efficiency, consistency, and communication at the local level in the permitting process.

Senator Katie Hester held a series of meetings with different interest groups over the past interim, which included a series of listening session led by Maryland Department of the Environment (MDE). This bill is the result of those conversations. One finding, which came from both the building community and agri-business, was a real frustration with the unpredictable nature of the septic permitting process. The standards change from county to county and communication about the permitting process, its standards, and timeline was often poor. This bill helps to make the system easier to use and more transparent.

This bill does several things:

1. It creates a database so an applicant can follow what stage their permit application is during the permitting process;
2. requires MDE to develop and make available a standardized permit form for the installation of on-site sewage disposal systems;
3. and it develops statewide standards for private, environmental health specialists who work in this industry.
4. MDE is also to host monthly meetings with local government employees working in this field to discuss the laws and interpretations of these issues. This will improve the understanding of these regulations and improve consistency in their application.

While the bill calls for adding \$5 million more annually into environmental health agency budgets, I recognize that underfunding and understaffing are a department-wide issue that needs to be addressed elsewhere, so I will be striking that language.

We have heard time and time again that both MDE and the Environmental Health Officers are severely understaffed. Better systems, training, and accountability will help make these important jobs a bit easier. As a result, the septic system permitting process that impacts our health and environment will be better and safer as well as more consistent and predictable for the development industry.